Chapter 13

Doing Narrative Analysis

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This chapter demonstrates how one version of narrative analysis – dialogical narrative analysis (DNA) – might be conducted. Adopting the methodology described by Brett Smith in Chapter 12 in this volume, I show how DNA can be put into practice to analyse interview data on the topic of transition from the army into civilian life. I demonstrate how to identify stories and themes/structures within them and how key analytical concerns of DNA, such as asking dialogical questions and considering what stories *do* both for and to people, might be addressed. The worked example shows how two people can tell very different stories about a particular experience (in this case, transition) and what the consequences of these different stories are for their lives.

Key terms

dialogical narrative analysis: a form of narrative analysis that examines how a story is put together from narrative resources and the effects that the story has in people's lives.

dialogical questions: types of questions that the researcher asks of the data in narrative analysis to open up the social, cultural and relational dynamics of stories.

narrative foreclosure: a situation in which the story one tells about one's life is seen as the only possible story that could be told.

narrative identity: a fluid and continual process of constructing and performing a social identity through the stories we tell about our lives.

narrative resources: the plots or storylines that society and culture make available to us and from which we selectively draw to construct the stories we tell.

theme-ing: the identification of patterns and structural elements in stories found in data.

Introduction

Dialogical narrative analysis (DNA; see Frank, 2012, and Chapter 12 in this volume) is a comparatively recent addition to the range of analytical approaches that focus upon narrative and storytelling. There are currently no guides available that demonstrate how you might go about doing a DNA. My aim in this chapter is therefore to show, rather than tell, how DNA might be practised using the example of stories told by two ex-servicemen about their experiences of transitioning out of the army into civilian life (see Appendix 1 in this volume for the interview transcripts that were used in the analysis). The analytical process that I present is, however, not intended as a 'recipe' or 'template' for doing DNA because DNA does not prescribe any step-by-step approach. The method is deliberately flexible to allow for movement of thought rather than providing a codified or procedural basis for producing research findings. For me, this is what makes it so exciting – although I concede that this lack of definite procedural steps can make it seem daunting for someone attempting narrative analysis for the first time. This chapter should be read as one example of how DNA can be performed, showcasing simply the types of analytical concerns that make up a DNA (for another example, see Report 5 in Appendix 2 in this volume). The analytical steps taken to explore people's stories (in particular the types of dialogical questions asked in an analysis) will vary depending on considerations such as the research topic and questions, source(s) of data and the researcher's relationship with the participants/storytellers themselves.

In order to situate myself in relation to the stories told by David and Brian, I will first outline my 'speaking position' as a researcher to give readers a sense of what I brought to the analysis and what may have shaped the way I engaged with the interview transcripts (for more on researchers and speaking positions, see Chapter 2 in this volume). My doctoral research, in which I used DNA, has explored the effects of surfing in the lives of combat veterans experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (the research presented in Appendix 2, Report 5 is drawn from that work). I therefore have some familiarity with the types of stories told by ex-servicemen like David and Brian. Whilst neither David nor Brian showed any indication of psychological distress based on their military experiences, their stories of transition and identity renegotiation resonate with some of the difficulties that the participants in my research faced upon leaving the forces (that is, in addition to their trauma and suffering). Accordingly, whilst I have attempted to analyse Brian's and David's stories 'on their own terms' as much as possible, it is perhaps inevitable that my understanding of other veterans' lives and experiences influenced how I approached Brian's and David's stories and my eventual interpretation of them. For example, I am familiar with stories like David's whereby veterans encountered the bewilderment of 'Civvie Street' when their military service had ended. By contrast, Brian's story was less familiar to me and taught me that the military can provide people with narrative resources that help them transition smoothly into a civilian environment.

Before I begin my demonstration of DNA, a brief comment on terminology is warranted. The terms 'story' and 'narrative' are often used interchangeably in the literature on narrative. This is partly because the meaning of these terms overlaps and a distinction is often difficult to

sustain. In this chapter though, I follow the broad distinction outlined by Brett Smith in Chapter 12 of viewing stories as the specific tales people tell of their lives whilst narratives are the broader 'story templates' and cultural structures/resources that people use to construct their individual stories. With this point in mind, I now present my analysis of David's and Brian's stories starting with my initial thoughts and readings of the transcripts. I then outline how I identified the types of stories they told, along with the main themes and structure of the stories. Next, I describe the process of working with dialogical questions to explore the two ex-servicemen's stories. Finally, I conclude with some reflections on the process of doing DNA.

Orienting to David's and Brian's stories

I began the analysis by immersing myself in the stories of David and Brian, that is, by reading and closely re-reading the interview transcripts which I understood as stories told by the two men about their transition out of the army. I quickly noticed that the interview data were more structured and the interviewer was more actively involved than would normally be the case in data generated specifically for narrative analysis. Typically narrative analysis relies on data generated from sources where participants are given the opportunity to develop lengthy stories about their experiences with minimal interruption. These include interviews but also visual narratives, diaries, internet blogs and particularly autobiographical work. Nevertheless, I found it useful to think of the transcripts themselves as stories with a beginning, middle and end, which Brian and David developed gradually in response to the interviewer's questions. After an initial reading of the transcripts, I re-read them with two broad questions in mind which formed my research questions for conducting the analysis. The first, following the original study's aims (see Appendix 1 in this volume), was 'How did

David and Brian experience their transition from the army to civilian life?' The second question, helping me focus on stories, was 'What stories helped David and Brian make sense of their transition experiences?' This is a typical question for narrative analysis and distinguishes it from other qualitative approaches. I then proceeded to equip myself to develop themes from the data by highlighting the portions of the transcripts that I felt spoke to these questions and recording in the margins initial ideas about the kinds of stories Brian and David were telling. As I am unable to demonstrate this specific process within the confines of this chapter, I provide a brief reflection in Box 13.1 that explains how 'theme-ing' the data relates to other aspects of doing DNA.

Box 13.1 The iterative process of doing a dialogical narrative analysis

DNA usually unfolds as an iterative process of data generation and data analysis: these proceed in tandem rather than sequentially (see Chapter 8 on grounded theory for another approach in which data generation and data analysis occur at the same time). For example, as I read the transcripts of interviews conducted early in a study, I may begin formulating analytical ideas about participants' stories that will inform the questions I ask in future interviews. The answers to these might lead me in new, unanticipated directions. By 'theme-ing' the transcripts, I identify patterns and structural elements of stories which I can later compare with other participants' stories and look for similarities and differences in their experiences. Asking dialogical questions (see below) is an important part of this process. For example, asking early on what people's stories are doing for and to them may help develop an understanding of these stories that shapes how the analysis unfolds. For this chapter, I have clearly been unable to engage fully in this iterative process as I did not collect the data myself and did not have access to the larger data set. My analysis of Brian's and David's

stories is therefore limited to what I have been able to discern about these stories from studying the transcripts and reflecting on the stories they told.

Identifying stories

What struck me most when reading David's and Brian's stories was the difference between their overall transition experiences. Whereas Brian seemed to have tactfully navigated his transition to civilian life with a degree of ease and efficiency, David wandered in a meaningless void in which his life as a civilian lacked the sense of purpose and direction previously granted him by his army career. Upon my initial reading of the transcripts, I was unsure how to make sense of this difference. Why was it that Brian had managed to find a way of being in civilian life that suited him and enabled him to carry on living a 'good life' whilst David seemed condemned to a life of apathy and banality without the army? To begin exploring this conundrum, I started looking for the stories that shaped their individual transition experiences and through which they made sense of their lives before, during and after leaving the army.

Clues to the story David constructed about his life in the army are given right at the start of his interview (other 'clues' or 'tips' on identifying stories can be found in Chapter 12). In response to the first question about whether the army influenced his sense of self (lines 1-13), David initiates a story about growing from boyhood to manhood in the army. For example, we learn that as a 'nipper', David lacked confidence and that he joined the army to get away because he 'didn't have a trade' and had 'no or very little education.' I interpreted this as a 'lowly beginnings' narrative in which the central character (David) uses the army as a

springboard for escaping his humble circumstances and pursuing something noble, worthwhile or virtuous perhaps. In the army, he became something that transcended his early life destiny. The story of transformation is continued in his response to the next question (lines 15-23):

Arnie: What aspects, if any, of being a soldier were important to you?

David: I was a member of a team and I was an important member of a team and I was recognized as doing something for my country. You know, I was prepared to go. If they say, 'Right, David, Kuwait has been attacked, you know, I was ready to go'. Yeah. It wasn't a case of 'Woah, it's their country, it's nothing to do with us'. If the boss wanted to send me, then away I go. That was important to me. It's like, as I say, I had an identity and I belonged to somewhere.

David's comments here suggest that his personal life story became caught up in the broader political narrative of the army and its role in society as protector/enforcer (for example, in the liberation of Kuwait as part of the first Gulf War in 1991). David was an important cog in a much larger machine that performed a vital social function. His role within the team provided his life with a sense of meaning and purpose and constituted an organizing principle for his life story. Furthermore, the values he considered noble and worthwhile (including honesty, discipline and obedience to authority) and which he sought to embody as part of his journey from lowly beginnings towards a higher state of virtue were derived from his place within the collective organization of the army. Throughout this chapter, I will unpack the implications of David's story about his military career for his transition to civilian life.

By contrast, Brian's story contains no evidence of the 'lowly beginnings' narrative that shaped David's experience. Brian provided no information about his upbringing or his reasons for joining the army, perhaps constructing his past as relatively inconsequential for his present story (that is, omitting his background from the narrative – Spector-Mersel, 2011). The 'type' of narrative that structured his experiences in the army is less readily apparent from his interview transcript. As such, I found it interesting to consider what story he was *not* telling. Unlike David, Brian's personal story did not seem to be encompassed by the broader societal 'master narrative' of the army and its place within society. Accordingly, whilst a sense of belonging to the larger collective was clearly important to Brian, there is no indication that he depended upon this identification with the collective to provide his life with meaning and value in quite the same way as David did. This is not to suggest that the army was unimportant to Brian's life story; on the contrary, it was instrumental in shaping the kind of person he became. Rather, his story was less about what military people are part of and more about what they are or what they do. He described the character role of 'soldier' and all that this entails, for example, being flexible and adaptable, having a sense of urgency and attention to detail and being disciplined, hard-working and reliable. The story he told was about demonstrating his appropriation of this character role by progressing through the rank structure of the army. Once again, I will unpack the implications of Brian's story for his transition experiences as the chapter unfolds.

Based on my reading of the transcripts, both David and Brian encountered a kind of 'narrative problem', that is, neither of them wanted to leave the army when they did and both had to find ways of continuing their life stories after a major chapter of those stories (that is,

their military careers) had ended. Having identified the stories that David and Brian told about their military lives, I began to explore how they each responded to this problem by considering the themes and structure embedded within their stories of transition to civilian life.

Bite-sized summary 1

Initial aspects of dialogical narrative analysis have been outlined and engaged with. This began with a brief consideration of my 'speaking position' as a researcher and analyst in relation to the data on two ex-servicemen's stories of the transition from army to civilian life. Dialogical questions were suggested that were appropriate to the data, would help to understand the storied nature of the data and would give shape to the analysis. Key stories were discerned within David's and Brian's interview transcripts. I also pointed to the analytical value of noting the absence of stories that a speaker could have used.

Identifying themes and structure

A number of key themes were repeatedly emphasized by both men throughout their stories of transition to the civilian world. One theme common to Brian's and David's stories was a sense of difference and superiority over civilians in terms of working practices. As Brian commented: 'I've noticed that the way ex-military guys manage their staff is much better than the way a civilian-trained person does' (lines 70-72). Both men portrayed themselves as direct, decisive, disciplined and willing to do things 'properly' whereas civilians in comparison were portrayed as lazy, unruly and interested in doing only the minimum amount of work required. This theme, in turn, relates to the broader notion of high standards and

traditional values that permeated every aspect of military life and that were seemingly absent or not recognized in civilian life. Such values and standards formed key components of both men's stories which shaped how they experienced their transition from the army into civilian life, albeit in different ways.

Highlighting the differences in their transition experiences, Brian's and David's stories each embodied a separate core theme in response to the problem of transition. The major theme in David's story is that of loss. David woefully and regretfully tells of losing his place in the organization that gave his life meaning and purpose and of feeling worthless and alone in civilian life. His despair is evident in his response to being asked whether he feels he is still in an important job: '[Sigh] People like to tell me I've got that now but I know I haven't got that now' (lines 35-36). He believes that nobody now cares about the values and standards that previously afforded him status and recognition within the army and which constituted his idea of striving for a noble and worthwhile life. Consequently his story of transition was marked by loss, apathy and regret. In contrast, the major theme in Brian's story is that of adaptability. Brian described one of the key attributes of soldiers as their flexibility and ability to adapt to new situations: 'the forces learned me how to adapt to new situations and this was just another situation to adapt to' (lines 216-218). He repeatedly emphasized how he was able to adapt his capabilities and his ways of relating to others to suit his new job and situation in civilian life. Brian was able to uphold his values and standards by changing his expression of them which, he admitted, was not always easy but ultimately it enabled him to continue his identification with army life during and after transition. His story of transition was thus marked by a sense of agency, adaptability and personal control.

In addition to themes, the structure of Brian's and David's stories reveals valuable information about their transition experiences (see Chapter 12 for further advice on identifying structure). David's transition story was structured by a narrative of decline: life once was good, meaningful and worthwhile and now it is bad, meaningless and worthless. David began to structure his story as a decline when he described leaving the army as disappointingly anti-climactic: 'No-one's calling me "Sergeant" any more. That was funny. That was a shock. That's when you knew. And then that's it – you walk out and no-one's prepared you for that' (lines 92-95). He then continued to develop the structural element of decline by making repeated references to the 'void' of civilian life and by telling of everything he missed about the army. Brian's story, on the other hand, embodies a more stable narrative trajectory: a transition has occurred, yet life carries on pretty much as it always has. This structure of stability is evident in the following comments where Brian compared his feelings toward himself before and after transition:

> when I was in the forces, you feel good about yourself anyway. You've got an identity there and you feel good about yourself. And since I've been out, it's almost the same I think – not much has changed there really. Obviously what I do now is different but I don't think I've changed a great deal. I still try to maintain my ideals and the principles that I had from before, which is perhaps why, every now and again, I've caused a few ructions because I've still tried to maintain and perhaps enforce my ideals on other people perhaps. (lines 286-293)

In both cases, the narrative structure of David's and Brian's stories highlighted important features of their lived experiences of transition as the catalyst for a descent into despair or as

a relatively seamless continuation of a prior life story. By considering how stories are told – that is, their narrative structure – we thus come to a fuller understanding of the experiences these stories not only recount but also help to bring about. To appreciate story structure, it can help to depict the trajectory of a person's story in graphical form. See Figure 13.1 for an example of this in relation to Brian's and David's stories.

[Insert Figure 13.1 near here]

Bite-sized summary 2

Key themes that were evident in Brian's and David's stories have been identified alongside the basic structure of their stories. Identifying themes (what is said) and structure (how it is said) provides valuable analytical information about stories that can help you understand participants' experiences. You can also use this information as the basis for asking more complex dialogical questions (see below).

Box 13.2 Presenting the analysis

In this chapter, I have chosen to present my analysis under headings drawn from the account of the analytic process offered in Chapter 12 in order to illustrate that process. In doing so, I would like to point out that a narrative analysis would not typically be presented in this way. An example of how narrative analysis may be presented and represented in textual form can be found in Appendix 2 (Report 5). In addition, there are many different ways to present a

narrative analysis and no strict guidelines on how this should be done. For example, the analysis might be structured under several subheadings that relate to different thematic or structural components of the stories identified, with each of these discussed in detail in the results section of a paper (for example, Smith, 2013a). Alternatively, the results of the analysis might be split into just two or three sections with the first describing the stories told by participants and subsequent sections detailing the effects of these stories in the participants' lives (for example, Caddick et al., 2015a). Further still, the analysis itself may be represented as a story, presented as an undivided whole with the purpose of showing rather than telling or explaining the significance of the data (for example, Smith, 2013b). As such, there is a variety of possibilities for presenting a DNA and plenty of room for creativity in deciding how to format the analysis.

Identifying the social, cultural and relational dynamics of stories: Asking dialogical questions

Up until this point in the analysis, it might appear as though Brian's and David's stories were personal tales they had spun around their experiences retrospectively in order to make meaning of their lives. To adopt such a view, however, would be to miss the social, cultural and relational dynamics that shaped not only the type of stories they told about their transition experiences but also the way they told them, their reasons for telling them and the consequences of telling these particular stories for their personal and social lives. Asking dialogical questions are a crucial means of opening up the social, cultural and relational dynamics of stories. This aspect of DNA can be complicated to get to grips with; further advice can be found in Chapter 12. In this section, I will explore three dialogical questions that enabled me to open up Brian's and David's stories and I will consider how these

dynamic influences affected their storied lives. The process of asking dialogical questions is summarized in Table 13.1.

Table 13.1 Asking dialogical questions

Type of question	**Example**	**Purpose**
Identity questions	How is the storyteller's identity shaped by the story they are telling?	To help us understand the ways in which people's identities develop according to the stories they tell about themselves.
Resource questions	What narrative resources does the storyteller borrow from the wider stock of cultural narratives in order to tell their story?	Stories are never simply one's 'own' and can never be fully original. All stories that people tell draw upon narrative structures that culture and society make available (for example, a 'rags to riches' plotline). Asking resource questions helps us understand how people are able to tell the stories they tell and where these stories come from.
Connection/affiliation questions	Who does this person's story connect them to/disconnect them from?	The process of telling stories about oneself is a thoroughly social one. Even if the story is told inside a person's mind, there will still be an 'imagined audience' that will be important to shaping the story. Certain stories may be approved or disapproved of by certain people or groups, connecting us to these people or disconnecting us from them. Understanding who shares a person's story and

		who is opposed to it gives us valuable information about the social process of storytelling.

Identity questions

Identity was a clear a focus of the original interviews conducted by Arnie Reed (see the preface to Appendix 1 in this volume), so it makes sense to start with identity questions. Narrative theorists often view personal identity as a social performance, constituted through stories (Smith and Sparkes, 2008). In other words, people not only *tell* stories to explore who they are; they *live*, *enact* and *perform* them in social life (Frank, 2010; Smith and Sparkes, 2008). From this perspective, identity can only be maintained as long as there are opportunities for performing that identity in a way that will be recognized by oneself and others as a socially 'valid' performance. It is clear from Brian's and David's interviews that they both sought to enact similar stories in civilian life that focused on their continued performance of the character role of 'soldier'. For both men, this meant continually striving to embody the values and ideals (for example, discipline, honesty and reliability) that shaped their respective stories of military life. For David, however, losing his place in the collective organization that validated his expression of these ideals – and constituted his way of living a good and virtuous life – resulted in him losing the opportunity to enact his preferred identity. For example, one way of enacting his military identity was by taking pride in his appearance and uniform as a reflection of virtue and discipline. As a school caretaker, opportunities to do this were limited:

> I miss walking out the door and making sure I'm all right. I'm proud to be a soldier. Now I walk out the door in my overalls and I think, 'Well, yeah, that's it'. You try to give an appearance of someone who's been trained and disciplined but it's not the same, it's not the same. You don't have the same effect as anywhere else. (lines 319-324)

Unlike David, Brian was seemingly able to continue his identity performance as 'soldier' in his new role in civilian life. Brian's story focused on being 'ex-forces' – on the type of person he became and still was through military service and training. He did not require continued membership in the armed forces to validate his identity performance, merely that others recognized him for it. As Brian put it, 'people know I'm ex-forces whether I tell them or not' (lines 433-434). His embodied performance of being a soldier was thus validated by others: 'It's just that they pick up on the way I act, the way I behave and the way I speak as well – they pick on it straight away and they know' (lines 436-438). For Brian, having others validate his social identity performance enabled him to sustain his military identity despite now being technically classed as a civilian: 'So, although I feel I have quite adjusted to civilian life, um, really I'm still an ex-serviceman. I'm not a civilian as such' (lines 441-443).

As David's and Brian's stories show, the process of creating and maintaining identity through storytelling does not take place in a social vacuum. Rather, it is an inherently relational or dialogical activity, depending on others to support, validate and sometimes contest these performances. DNA thus enables us to consider how people's identities are created and transformed through a social process of telling and enacting stories about ourselves.

Bite-sized summary 3

Narrative identity has been introduced and described as relational – that is, a social process that evolves along with other people in the storyteller's life. Asking 'identity questions' helps us to understand how people tell stories to make sense of who they are and who they might become.

Resource questions

Narrative resources are the plots or storylines that society and culture make available to us, from which we selectively draw to construct the stories we tell. Gaining 'access' to such resources is important and may depend on certain characteristics or experiences that make it possible for a person to narrate particular stories about themselves (for example, one's status as a current or former soldier in the British army). Not surprisingly, the majority of the narrative resources used by Brian and David to tell stories about their lives were provided to them by the army. Yet the availability of resources for telling stories about their post-army lives seemed to differ between David and Brian. For Brian, the ability to maintain close links with other ex-forces personnel was an important resource that enabled him to continue his storied performance of 'being ex-forces' and have that performance validated by significant others. This was evident in the way he talks about his first job as a civilian:

> I treated my first move into civilian life, especially the job, as another posting really and it worked quite well because the first job I went to...I was working in a small department of about ten people and six of those were ex-forces and they were all from

> my old regiment and some I knew from before anyway so really it was very similar to another posting, just another job. (lines 191-196)

Narrative resources are linked to narrative identity in that resources are required for sustaining identity performances. Brian managed to keep alive some of the army's narrative resources by maintaining links with other ex-military personnel, thereby establishing a sense of continuity between his former military identity and his current position in civilian life. Furthermore, Brian was able creatively to adapt the narrative resources given to him by the army (for example, the 'adaptability' and 'flexibility' of good soldiers) to suit his new role in society. By emphasizing the adaptability of soldiers, he not only reinforced his identity performance but also found a useful story to guide him through the experience of transition.

David, on the other hand, found that the narrative resources he depended on for narrating his story had been stripped away by his experience of leaving the army. Being part of a team was an important resource that no longer existed for David once he was forced to leave. Furthermore, upon leaving, he was made to surrender everything that connected him to his story including his uniform, his title as 'Sergeant' and his access to army locations and relationships. Accordingly, all of the props that had supported his story of transformation from lowly beginnings to being an important part of a much larger story were removed, leaving him feeling empty and without an alternative story to fall back on. As David's words suggested, when he walked out the gate on his last day he was confronted immediately with this unsettling emptiness: 'you walk out and there's nothing – there's that void. It's just like an open space, an empty space' (lines 127-129). David went on to describe how unprepared he felt for leaving the army, which may be one reason why he experienced a great 'void' in

civilian life. In Frank's (2013) terms, there was no 'narrative map' to guide him in civilian life; his previous map – his sense of direction in life – was constituted solely by his place within the organizational structure of the army.

DNA enables us to appreciate that people's stories are not theirs alone and that they necessarily borrow from the broader narrative resources supplied by culture, society and various institutions (such as the military) in order to tell stories. People then exercise a degree of agency and choice in adapting and applying these resources to their personal stories, although they do this within certain material and discursive limits. For example, whilst Brian and David, theoretically speaking, had access to the same set of narrative resources in the army, David's ability to rework these resources in civilian life was limited both by the story he was previously caught up in and by a lack of opportunity for enacting a military identity in the school where he worked post-transition. Brian, on the other hand, seemed well positioned to carry the army's narrative resources with him into his civilian work environment through the story he told and the connections he subsequently made. Below, I discuss how connections with others are both cultivated and inhibited through stories.

Connection/affiliation questions

The stories we tell can connect us to others who may share our story and our perspective on things. They may also disconnect us from other people who contest or oppose our stories. Illustrating the relational focus of DNA, an important question to ask is who the storyteller is connected to or alienated from by the stories they tell. Both David and Brian recounted instances in which their stories of military life – including their continued efforts to embody

the ideals that shaped these stories – complicated their relationships with their civilian counterparts. David, for example, described how 'being an ex-soldier' hindered his efforts to integrate himself into civilian working practices while previously working as a truck driver:

> Where it hinders me is the fact that I like things in lines. I like things in neat packages and so when I go – like when I was driving the truck, when I used to come back at night, I used to park all the wagons up so all the bumpers were level. Funny as it may seem, they had them parked all over the car park. It made it harder to get out. (lines 238-243)

Likewise, for Brian, continuing his storied performance of 'being ex-forces' seemed to alienate him from civilian colleagues:

> I was going about it [the job] differently to how everyone else did. Everyone else did what was expected and I was going that extra sort of mile every time and I found that was causing a lot of problems because I was doing it and no-one else was. (lines 83-86)

The values that David and Brian were invested in and which shaped their stories were not shared by others and set up boundaries between them and their civilian counterparts. Fortunately perhaps for Brian, he was able to find others who shared his stories of 'being ex-forces' and who appreciated the military values he continued to display:

> it was quite helpful to speak to them and find out what was going on. Just coming out and being a bit of the new boy there and it is a slightly different environment but that...I felt, I think things would have been different if I hadn't gone for that job first off and been surrounded by ex-forces people, especially some of the guys I'd known from before as well, or if...and even ones I didn't know, we had mutual friends with other people we knew between us, so that worked out really well. (lines 203-210)

Working with other ex-forces people seemed to facilitate Brian's transition to civilian life by connecting him with others who knew what he was about and who embodied a similar 'character type' as former soldiers. Thus, whilst Brian's military identity and stories often disconnected him from civilian relationships, they helped him forge bonds with other ex-forces personnel which, in turn, helped smooth his experience of transition to the civilian world. By asking such connection/affiliation questions, DNA helps us to understand storytelling as a thoroughly social process which influences not only the teller but other people in the teller's social worlds.

Bite-sized summary 4

The notion of 'dialogical questions' has been introduced as a key analytical concern of DNA. Asking dialogical questions helps to unravel the social, cultural and relational dynamics of stories, that is, the ways in which stories are shaped by broader cultural narratives and how other people are often strongly influential in shaping the way in which we tell stories about ourselves, who we tell these stories to and why, and how they are told. There are many kinds

of questions you can ask in relation to your data to open up the analysis: you are not limited to those presented in this chapter (see Chapter 12 for further examples of dialogical questions).

Box 13.3 Thinking with stories

Thinking *with* stories rather than just *about* them can be useful when conducting a DNA. Thinking about a story involves abstractly scrutinizing it, dissecting it and theorizing it from a disciplinary perspective in order to develop theoretical abstractions. Thinking *with* stories, on the other hand, involves trying to understand the story from the point of view of the teller. Imagine yourself telling that story and what it might feel like. This is similar to adopting an 'emic' perspective, as described by Sparkes and Smith (2014), in which the researcher endeavours to 'enter into' the phenomenon being investigated (something that echoes the phenomenological commitment found in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis – see Chapter 4). Doing so requires patience and thoughtfulness but is worth the extra effort as it can enable the researcher to understand participants' stories on a deeper level. It is also important when working with dialogical questions. For example, by developing a deeper appreciation of participants' stories – by getting inside the story and feeling its nuances – the researcher may get a feel for the most important concerns from the storyteller's perspective and thus for what questions should be asked that speak to those concerns and that may help to open up the analysis.

Synthesizing the results

After opening up Brian's and David's stories through the use of dialogical questions, I returned to thinking about their stories as a whole in order to synthesize the results. This is similar to the process of typology building and pulling the analysis together as described by Brett Smith in Chapter 12. At this stage in my analytical process, I wondered whether Brian's and David's stories might represent different 'ideal types' as narratives of transition from the army to civilian life. As part of this process, I considered naming their stories in a way that would capture the overall content and storytelling in Brian's and David's interview transcripts. Put rather crudely, we might call Brian's story a narrative of 'adaptation' to civilian life whereas David told a story of 'un-adaptation' or 'mal-adaptation'. Brian's story of transition and identity renegotiation positioned him as having made a successful transition into civilian life. Drawing on the notion of soldiers as adaptable to new situations, he characterized his transition as successful and appeared to be content with life. Whilst he evidently missed his time in the forces, particularly the social side of army life, he had found ways of replacing what he missed and therefore experienced his current life as a 'good compromise'. By contrast, David's transition story depicted him as 'un-adapted' to civilian life. He experienced the civilian world as an alien landscape where people played by different rules and the things that mattered – and still matter – to him about army life were not valued by the people around him. He appeared unhappy with his lot in life and was beginning to question its purpose. The two men's stories thus appear radically different and may be said to constitute opposing 'ideal types' of transition narrative.

Identifying function

DNA conceives of stories as 'actors' in people's lives. This means stories do things for and to people that make a difference to their lives and affect them in both good and dangerous ways. An important component of any dialogical narrative analysis is thus likely to be identifying what effects the story is having in a person's life. David's and Brian's transition narratives

affected their lives in distinct ways. For David, being unable to continue his story of personal transformation in which he became a respected member of an important team meant that he was destined for an unhappy and apparently meaningless life as a civilian. His story led to what Freeman (2009) termed 'narrative foreclosure', that is, the story he had been telling about his military life had ended and there was no way of moving creatively into the future. The future, then, seemed to hold nothing more than an endless repetition of an empty and meaningless present, a situation of despair encapsulated in David's comments about his current job: 'This is me for the rest of my life' (line 223). As such, his story had effectively ended and there appeared to be no way of opening up a new chapter. His story thus worked *on* him in ways that prevented him from exploring future possibilities and living a productive and meaningful life.

Brian's story seemed to affect him in a rather more positive way. By cultivating a sense of continuity in identity and narrative resources, his story of 'adaptability' enabled him to transition amicably into civilian life, despite him not wanting to leave the army or being totally ready for the transition. Unlike in David's case, Brian's life story seemed to move smoothly into a new chapter. His story thus worked for him by enabling him to adjust to life without the army, helping him also to address the 'narrative problem' that I identified earlier of continuing his life story after the ending of a major chapter. The different effects of David's and Brian's stories may be suitably summed up in the following responses:

Arnie: Um, do you think you've adjusted to civilian life?

David: No. No. I would say that in one easy answer there. (lines 392-394)

Arnie: Looking back, would you have done anything differently? Or not?

Brian: No, I don't think so. No, everything's worked out as I would have hoped. Yeah. (lines 452-455)

As 'actors' in their lives, Brian's and David's stories thus demonstrate the importance of narratives in understanding the effects of transition and identity renegotiation for ex-forces personnel.

Reflections

DNA involves thinking about how people and their stories coexist. In DNA, stories are conceptualized as dynamic, relational and constitutive forces in people's lives. From this perspective, the world may be viewed as something akin to a web of story-mediated interaction between different social actors. This said, one challenge when doing DNA is to avoid seeing everything as the product of a story and thus reducing all forms of human action to narrative. Not everything is narrative and, as such, it is important when doing narrative analysis not to force all that a participant says or does into story-shaped explanations. I hope to have avoided this temptation in this chapter whilst also demonstrating the fruitfulness of DNA in terms of illuminating people's subjective lives and experiences. As a final thought, I wish to point out that any DNA must necessarily remain unfinalized. David and Brian are (presumably) still out there in the midst of stories that are continually unfolding to this day. Much might have changed in the years since the original interviews were conducted and David and Brian may well have moved on to tell vastly different stories about their experiences of civilian life. Indeed, what was once true of their transition experiences may no

longer be so, as meanings often change with the passage of time and experiences are always reinterpreted from the vantage point of the present. DNA therefore invites us to study people's stories – and the effects of their stories – whilst all the time remembering that, when the analysis is over, the story goes on.

Box 13.4 Practise identifying stories, themes and structure

The following extract is taken from an interview with a combat veteran named Samuel (a pseudonym), which was conducted as part of the project reported by Caddick et al. (2015a) and summarized in Appendix 2 (Report 5) in this volume. Samuel is a member of a UK-based veterans' surfing charity who has recently relocated himself to another part of the country and has also been treated for alcoholism. The charity of which he is a member was set up to help veterans dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), although Samuel himself was not officially diagnosed with PTSD. Samuel suffered multiple problems including relationship breakdown and a descent into alcoholism following ten years' service in the military. The interview from which this extract is taken was conducted after Samuel had been a regular member of the surfing charity for two years.

Read the extract and begin to consider what type of story Samuel begins to construct in response to the first question and what extra detail is given in response to the second. Think about the key themes that are evident in the extract and what the structure of the story might be. Consider, for example, what the trajectory of Samuel's life story is which is revealed in

his responses. If you want to stretch your understanding of narrative analysis, consider what dialogical questions you might ask to gain further insight into this extract.

Nick: So where do you think your life is going at the moment?

Samuel: Forwards probably, yeah – yeah, I mean it all just seems really positive at the moment, I know I've got friends around me. I've made more friends here in a couple of years than I had back home in a lifetime in sometimes – you know, what I'd count as real friends, alright – it might be ten, but that's still…I think ten good friends is quite a lot to be honest. Yeah – and I think that is just kind of – that's moving forward but it's not moving forwards too fast, I'm just taking things steady, enjoying what's happening, but also making – I think learning that stuff, I think – I thought there was nothing you could tell me about anything and now I realized that I actually knew sod all. So I've just opened my ears a bit and kind of learnt a bit and I'm just enjoying it and it feels like an adventure at the minute of life – do you know what I mean? And I just feel quite lucky that I've got a second chance at it because I think a couple of years ago, I might not had, it might have been different, so yeah.

Nick: OK, and what do you think your biggest challenge is in life at the moment?

Samuel: Erm, my biggest challenge is – my biggest challenge is quite often like, the smallest ones in some ways. You know, my biggest challenges are when I'm feeling that I'm having a real bad time – and sometimes the biggest challenge is picking the phone up and talking to someone, being – I think being honest with people about how I'm feeling. It's so easy for me to say I'm alright when

> I know I'm not and I need to talk about something, making that first step into it, I find really hard. Opening the door to getting some help or advice I find really difficult and it doesn't seem to get any easier with practice either. And relationships are still challenging I think. But again – I think I was lucky in rehab in that I think I got quite an insight into myself – maybe into how I've done things badly in the past. You know, I can see where I've gone wrong, so I've got no real excuse to keep repeating it, if I do it's kind of like my choice – it's up to me if I wanna keep…I've reached a point now where I can say 'Well, I know that's not gonna work, do I really wanna do it again?' – and sometimes doing it again is actually the easy option. You know – keep screwing up, keep treating people badly, sometimes in the short term is the easy solution, so sometimes doing the right thing is sometimes the challenge, yeah.

Chapter summary

In this chapter I provided an example of the process of conducting a dialogical narrative analysis. I began by identifying the key stories that David and Brian used to construct their experiences of transition from military life. I then highlighted the themes and narrative structure of these stories, including loss and narrative decline in David's story compared to adaptability and narrative stability in Brian's. Following this, I demonstrated one of the key analytical features of DNA by posing dialogical questions in relation to the data. Exploring these questions highlighted how narrative identity, narrative resources and connection/affiliation between the storyteller and other people were important aspects of David's and Brian's stories that powerfully shaped their transition experiences with various consequences for and on their lives.

Further reading

The full version of the article summarized in Report 5 (see Appendix 2) provides an example of a dialogical narrative analysis study (see Caddick et al., 2015a). Two further papers from the same project also provide examples of DNA in action by exploring 'collective stories' and peer relationships among combat veterans (Caddick et al., 2015b) and processes of masculinity, health and help-seeking among combat veterans (Caddick et al., 2015c). Frank's (2012) chapter in the book *Varieties of Narrative Analysis* provides a theoretically sophisticated and detailed overview of the method of DNA.

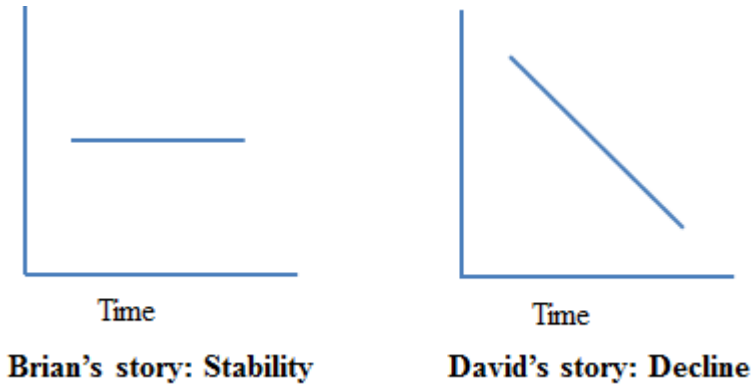

Figure 13.1 Brian's and David's narrative trajectories: the x axis represents time while the y axis represents the trajectory of the narrative.